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THE NATIONAL MAGAZINE.

POLITICS.

THE LATE PARLIAMENT—THE STATE OF THE COUNTRY— THE NEW ELECTIONS.

"I am convinced that a *tory* feeling is that which it is for the happiness of the country to cherish; and that when this is unfashionable, and its open avowal unpopular, a feverish and uncomfortable state is implied."—REGINALD HEBER.

BEFORE this paper will have gone to press, the parliament will have gone the way of all parliaments: it will be dissolved—defunct—gathered to the great roll of the past, and we may speak of it without fear either of a breach of its living privileges, or of raising the angry ghosts of those which are now no more. Parliament is a creature of an anomalous character, to which our ordinary rules do not apply;—while it lives, we may confess our fear of it, without suffering the imputation of cowardice, and when it is dead, no charitable rules *de mortuis*, interfere to scare us from the severity of posthumous criticism. We are willing to take advantage of the liberty which custom gives, and the rather, as the doing so seems to be consistent with the public good: we shall wound no personal feelings by saying what we think of the late parliament, and we may, perhaps, contribute to swell the loudness of the public voice, which cries earnestly and boldly, and which ought to cry still more earnestly and still more boldly, for a parliament which may deserve, and obtain, more respect in the eyes of the country, than that which has just been dismissed.

A more painfully laborious session than the last, the experience of members of parliament cannot point out: the attendance has been harassing—the discourse incessant, and the useful business transacted almost nothing. This is the greatest reproach that can be thrown upon a deliberative assembly which is convened for the despatch of important national concerns; it cannot assume a negative character, for not to do good is to do evil, by bringing public contempt upon that which should derive its most wholesome influence through the public respect. The session commenced under gloomy auspices; the country was distressed; its revenue decreasing; its population inadequately employed, and, in consequence, ill fed and discontented; its home trade diminished and diminishing, and its trade with foreign countries diminishing also in profit, while it increased in amount. Domestic trade—agricultural improvement—employment of the poor—consideration of their condition, and the best means of providing for their subsistence—the monetary system—the shipping laws—the laws relative to importation of foreign goods—the improvement of our system of administration of justice—all these were subjects which demanded examination at all events, if not legislative modification. Some of them were talked

about, but upon which of them has any thing been done deserving the attention and the gratitude of the public? Not one. Even the propositions in the speech from the throne, at the commencement of the session, have not been carried into effect; and imbecility and perplexity seem to have combined to cast their stultifying influence upon the deliberations of the British house of commons. We must guard, however, against being understood to speak universally; for we are anxious to show that when we censure, it is not for the sake of indulging in abuse, but in order to make the truth manifest. We do not deny that many excellent intentions have been exhibited, and many excellent speeches made; but the good intentions have not been accompanied by the energy, determination, and ability which can alone render good intentions valuable in great affairs; and the good speeches have been too much in the form of essays, framed for the purpose of publication to the kingdom through the newspapers, and not calculated to *compel* the practical application of the power of the legislature to the practical evils under which the people suffer.

We have said that even the recommendations of the king's government, at the commencement of the session, have not been carried into effect; but we by no means wish to be understood as admitting that if they had, the country ought to have been satisfied. A government declaration less fitted to the time, and less calculated to satisfy the people for whose proper use and benefit a government is supported and paid, could hardly be imagined; and so strong was the public and parliamentary sense of this fact at the time, that it would at once have been expressed by the rejection of the address, but for the strange manœuvre adopted by the tact of the whig party, which, following that profound and dignified politician, Mr. Hume, thought proper to join the ministerial vote. Hence have come all the disgraceful imbecilities of the last session. Government, from the very outset, felt themselves upon so very feeble a foundation in the house of commons, that nothing but the inattention or caprice of their opponents, coupled with an incessant care in that meanest part of ministerial duty, the urging of members to the house on divisions, could keep them from continual defeats; and thus, destitute of numerical strength, as well as of intellectual ability, they have spent their time in a feverish anxiety to *avoid difficulties*, and have not *dared* to enter upon the important business of the country, as ministerial men ought to be prepared to do, or at once yield up the reins of government. In the present domestic condition of this country, with a great part of the population notoriously steeped in wretchedness, through want of employment and consequent want of food, it was natural to have expected from the government a recommendation to parliament of an immediate consideration of a subject so important. Instead of this, there was found in the speech an assertion intended to shuffle the subject off altogether. The distress was made light of, and called partial; and that too in the face of county meetings, and of declarations most painfully general and unanimous, that the most poignant distress had spread, like a flood of bitter waters, over almost the whole mass of the population. The universal kingdom cried shame upon this declaration of the ministry, and yet they ventured upon it, rather than undertake a subject to which they knew they were inadequate. They knew they had no remedy; but instead of appealing to parliament, and stating their willingness to lead the way in inquiry, and in doing whatever the development of the truth might cause to appear expedient in the matter, they had the hardihood to deny the existence of the disease—

evidently trusting, not on a certain calculation, but on a calculation of uncertainty, that time would bring things round, and that by a subsequent denial of the then present truth, they might escape the public responsibility which its admission would have thrown upon them. Upon the motion of an opposition member, the house was, however, in some time after, engaged for four successive, but not successful nights, in making speeches upon this subject. Many of the speeches were, no doubt, as speeches, worthy of considerable approbation; but it seemed as if members thought that when they had made a long, perhaps an able, speech, they had done what alone they had come there to do, and there was the end; and many of them talked an immense quantity of dull common place matter, which it was the grossest waste of time to utter, and which only wearied and annoyed the public, who looked for something better worthy of the state of circumstances in which they found the nation plunged. There are two plain propositions upon this subject, which we hold to be worth a hundred volumes of preliminary discourse, even though that discourse be parliamentary; they are these. First, that the soil, seas, rivers, mines, machinery, and other resources of the united kingdom, are abundantly sufficient, if properly used, to sustain *comfortably* a population far greater than that which now exists within the united kingdom. Secondly, that the said population is not comfortably supported. We believe there are very few who would venture to deny either of these propositions, and they bring the preliminary matter into a narrow compass, but certainly not the less important on account of its condensed form. The first proposition, it will be observed, is a conditional one, and the condition is that which all subsequent inquiry should be directed to—it is that which the people expect will be looked to, and which even those who have private interests at stake, and monopolies to maintain, which blind them to the necessity of its consideration, would do well to look to, lest a period should come when the authority which they now possess to arrange the matter for their best advantage compatible with the necessities of the people, may not be regarded. Upon this great point then—the distress of the common people—the parliament of the last session has done nothing, with the exception of making a law by which three millions of annual revenue are to be given up, in order that the people may buy beer to drink, at about three-fourths of the price they used to pay for it. How monstrous does this seem? A people is notoriously stricken with poverty from a stagnation of business in the country—from a cessation of the work of production and consumption, arising out of no physical impossibility, or lack of materials of production, but occasioned by some political defect—some malarrangement by which the means of good are not turned to a good end; and the remedy applied—shades of Heraclitus and Democritus arise, and weep and laugh in turn at the folly, the egregious miserable folly of modern British statesmen!—the remedy applied, is to make beer cheaper by the full sum of a penny farthing by the imperial quart! This magnificent piece of legislation for the benefit of the lower classes, who are afflicted with the absence of something to eat, is exclusively British. We are really glad that it is one of the blessings in which we Irish do not participate. We thank our old and much respected friend, the chancellor of the exchequer, for thus sparing us the necessity of evincing our gratitude; we had rather “burst in ignorance” of the blessings of his beer bill, than be suffocated by the pressure of grateful sentiments for which we should not be able to find adequate expression.

We choose to dwell upon this matter, because it is really by far the most important *act* of the session; it involves the relinquishment of a portion of revenue which is in itself a thing of no small importance, and it shows what such a chancellor of the exchequer as ours may do, when his colleagues in the government, who are not of quite such a peculiar genius for great affairs as he shows himself to be, are too much harrassed to consider attentively what he is about. As England is situated, with her public debt so enormous, her financial concerns are by far the most important of all those with which the government is intrusted. Almost every thing, as it is said, resolves itself in the end into a matter of finance; therefore it behoves us to be most particular about the character, and about the mental capabilities of the gentleman to whose management our finances are principally confided. So important indeed are his avocations, that it would be a thing of some difficulty to describe all that he ought to be, but every one can tell what he ought *not*. He ought not to be a man "running to and fro, and at his wit's end;" he ought not to be a man resolving on this to-day, on that to-morrow, and on something else a'-Wednesday, and publishing his crude and undigested resolves to a suffering yet pitying public, as fast as one arises and another is given up; he ought not to be a person who was never suspected of having taken a large or original view of any thing; finally, he ought not to be a man as completely at the bidding of a prime minister who knows nothing of finance, as a sergeant is at the bidding of the captain of his company, and he ought not to be a man to whom his place is every thing. If our readers do not see pretty plainly where the man is to be found, who is all that we have described as what a chancellor of the exchequer ought *not* to be, we are much mistaken. Financial views are taken, and financial measures are resorted to by our government, which are more worthy of Mr. Hume, or any other pedlar in politics, than of men of comprehensive minds; measures which, if persevered in, must, ere long, make this nation contemptible as well as miserable. It is often a pitiful maxim in private affairs, but always a most fatally erroneous one in national concerns, that to save is to gain; yet this principle of saving, where their own personal interests are not concerned, seems to be the only one of which our government has any notion. It seems never to be remembered, that to create wealth is better than to diminish expenditure; and we find the whole policy of government tending to deaden the incitement to production, and to paralyze the efforts which a different system of policy would create throughout the country. If in all countries, in all cases, a system of industrious exertion and liberal expenditure be preferable to one of mere thrift and penurious saving, it is most particularly so in this, in consequence of the peculiar circumstances in which our national debt places us. If the greater portion of our expenditure be necessarily in that condition that it is utterly impossible we can apply the reduction system to it, then this system, as a general one, *must* be inadequate; and not only is it so in reality and practice, but the effect of every reduction and contraction of the remuneration of labor, which makes money more valuable, is in truth to increase the burthen of that portion of expenditure depending on the public debt, which cannot be reduced. If the larger portion of our expenditure be fixed to a nominal amount of money, it is the very extremity and climax of absurdity to pursue a system of economy, the effect of which is almost to double the real amount of what continues nominally the same. Yet this our political

directors do all they can to effect, both by their commercial policy, which looks only to making things *cheap*, and by their discouragement of an extended small-paper currency. Every practical man of business knows that money is to commerce like water to the wheel—if the quantity of it be contracted, the impetus is proportionably diminished; a ready market is not to be found, and therefore producers cease to produce, business stagnates, and caution takes the place of enterprise. Thus does the contraction of the currency diminish the extent of business and the profit on that which continues to be done, while it renders the fixed payments for taxation, and for all permanent engagements, much more burthensome than they were before. Yet to this system of a contraction of the currency has the government and the late parliament, clung with a pertinacity which only marks their obstinacy, and their ignorance of the operations of domestic trade. Their ears are open to the cry of capitalists, whose interest it is that the quantity of money in circulation should be small, in order that their own accumulations may be more valuable; but they neglect in this, as they do in every thing else, the interests of the poor man, who has no wealth but the limbs wherewith he labors. It may, perhaps, be said, that we in Ireland have no reason to complain on the score of the contraction of the currency, since the law for suppressing small notes does not extend to this kingdom; but our trade is so much connected with England now, that whatever affects English prosperity affects ours. In England we dispose of all our surplus produce, or rather the produce which we are too poor, unfortunately, to be able to consume ourselves, although we want it; and as English prices are affected by the contraction of their money, we also are immediately affected by the same cause; and so we shall continue to be, and affected to our serious harm and loss, unless a parliament can be found which shall have sagacity enough to be able to comprehend, that in order to check the evil of a redundant paper money circulation, it is not absolutely necessary to abolish that circulation altogether. Mr. Hume would have all electors to pledge their new members to rigid economy; Mr. Brougham would have them insist upon unqualified support of all measures for the abolition of colonial slavery; the *Times* newspaper would have them to exact promises of a determination to repeal the corn laws; but if electors will listen to us—for we have our nostrum as well as our neighbours—they will insist that none shall represent them but such as will assist in restoring a circulation of paper money, with proper provisions for securing its safety. If money continue so scarce *in the country* as it is at present—if its value continue so great, while its nominal amount in taxation remains the same, the kingdom cannot go on with its present expenditure; it must either cripple its establishments until they become ridiculously and dangerously feeble, or it must compound with the national creditor. This is the state of affairs which the old parliament has left as a legacy to the new. We hope a chancellor of the exchequer will be found, capable of taking an enlarged view of the resources of the country, who will take up this branch of finance, and have the sense and the *courage* to treat it fairly, notwithstanding Sir Robert Peel's pet prejudices on the subject. We know that a single good law to establish a free currency on a firm foundation, would be something better worth looking back upon, at the end of a session, than a series of blunderings in and blunderings out; of abortive and contradictory plans respecting annuities, and spirit duties, and sugar duties, and Irish stamps, and Irish tobacco, all of which have been cobbled at within the

last six months, keeping the public in doubt, and throwing profits here and there, until business became a lottery, and, after all, doing nothing that a man of sense to devise, and of some parliamentary power to persuade, could not have easily done in a week.

With regard to the improvements in the administration of justice, which, after the needful food and clothing of the people, is the next most important object which a government and legislature can attend to, the late session promised much, and has done hardly anything. In the matter of forgery, indeed, the commons attempted to do some little, but as that little the lords thought proper to do away, we may be excused for passing somewhat lightly over the labours expended on the subject.

The government have, to be sure, provided for the increase of their patronage by the addition of some common law judges, and they wished, if they had been able, to add a judge in equity also—but the system, which every one acknowledges to be so defective as to be in many points monstrous and absurd, remains the same, and there seems to be no chance of its improvement while it rests in the hands of persons who cannot trust their own intellects, (and indeed their diffidence is the most reasonable and judicious feature in their conduct,) beyond the details of the mere practitioner. How long are we to remain afflicted with a system of law, by which a man can hardly convey an acre of ground to his neighbour, without covering half an acre of parchment with the necessary writings, and after all, leave it in considerable doubt whether a chancery lawyer might not be able to pick a flaw in his title if it were questioned? How long is all the nonsense of special pleading to remain? How long must a man make the assertion of a bundle of ludicrous falsehoods, such as fill up ordinary declarations, the foundation of his solemn appeal for justice in a court of law? How long must the indictments for criminal offences consist of a mass of unintelligible jargon, and men accused of crimes, be called upon to answer guilty, or not guilty, before God and their country, of charges couched in language which it is almost if not altogether, impossible to understand? How long are men to be told that whether guilty or not guilty, they must solemnly plead not guilty, in order that the investigation may take place, without which no conviction is satisfactory? All these things are postponed to a more convenient season; but we are to have a batch of new judges, aye, and we are to pay them too, and that in a metallic currency, while it is notorious that four judges are left in Westminster-hall with absolutely nothing to do. The *business* of the court of Exchequer, in Westminster-hall, (we could point to something very like this in Dublin too,) would seem an absolute farce, a piece of exquisite fun, only that we have to pay such a swinging sum for the amusement:—now and then the court assembles at eleven, and sits on very arduous occasions until two, and yet without taking any means to make this court discharge its share of the public business, new judges are appointed. This is the work of the late parliament—we hope better things from the next.

It was our intention to have given a brief digest of the proceedings of the late session, accompanied by such remarks as the matters we should record might appear to deserve, but when we cast our eye over the enormous mass of papers which the session had produced, and the quantity of speeches which had produced nothing, we felt how wearisome the task would be to ourselves, and how little likely to be profitable or pleasant to our readers. We therefore bid farewell to piles of returns,

which have cost so much trouble to prepare, and so much money to print, but which no one dreams of reading; and to printed copies of bills, which have gone through a stage or two, and then, from their own absurdity, or the indolence of their promoters, have sunk, never to rise again. Farewell all ye "tape-tied trash," farewell hundreds of pages of "estimates," and "revenue enquiry," and thousands of pages of correspondence respecting Greece, and tens of thousands of pages of East Retford disfranchisement evidence. Farewell accounts of "tobacco," and "spirits foreign and imported;" of "rum," and of "slaves," and of "proceedings of divorce," and of "importation of horned cattle," and of "lunatics and idiots," (but no wonder that a fellow feeling should prompt minute researches into their welfare,) and a thousand other voluminous topics if we had time to enumerate them. The session has closed, the parliament is no more; and we are now too full of hopeful anticipations of the future, to dwell with painful exactness on the melancholy abortions of the past.

The loyalty and good feeling of our readers, will, we trust, not take offence that we have gone so far in our political article without advert- ing to the death of George the fourth, and the accession of his brother, which have taken place since our last political paper was written. A political essay is not the place to touch upon these events in the way which would best do justice to the feelings which we should wish to express respecting them. Peace be to the ashes of the one; may a happy and prosperous reign be the fortune of the other:—politically, we look upon a king only as the crown and apex of the government; as a man to whom we owe certain duties, because of the functions which he exercises, and which it is the policy of our constitutional law that he should fall into, through hereditary right. Although, according to the theory of our constitution, the kingly authority does not even momentarily cease by the demise of the person holding it, but immediately becomes vested in his legal successor, yet as the manner of exercising the sovereign authority is not so strictly limited but that it may take a different colour, according to the understanding and temper of him who wields it, a change in that person is one which *may be* fraught with very important consequences to the country. Passing over a great many matters of form, the use of which we hope those concerned in them see more clearly than we, the most important event which *must* necessarily take place within a limited time, in consequence of the demise of the sovereign, is the new election of the house of commons. At the present moment this event is felt to be one of so much importance, as to absorb the interest of all others within its vortex, and until it has taken place, and the minds of men great and small throughout the kingdom, are freed from the agitation and anxiety which it naturally occasions, it is difficult to judge of the probable effect which the character of the new sovereign will have upon the character of the political acts of the state. In the interval between the death of the late king and the dissolution, it was vain to attempt to draw the parliament into a deliberate discussion of important affairs—the very large minority on the political part of the address, shewed the temper of the house to be anything but favourable towards the ministry, yet on the question of the settlement of a regency, previously to the dissolution of parliament, a settlement so apparently indispensable to ensure the rational government of the realm, we find the ministerial resistance very powerful, swelled as it was by the numbers who dreaded entering upon any lengthy and important discussion at such a time. The members

felt themselves on the bed of a temporary political death, at all events, and were too much occupied with thoughts of the future, to trouble themselves much with matters pertaining to the present. Some unsettled affairs should be dispatched, and these they have got rid of as quickly as possible, bestowing as little consideration upon them as their nature would admit of, and chiefly anxious that they should in any way be settled. We are not to suppose therefore, that until the new parliament has come before the country, the public can form a just estimate of the turn which political affairs will take in the new reign. It is very doubtful that, considering the state of the house of commons for the last six weeks of the life of the late king, the ministry could have held their places, had it not been impossible that others could be appointed at the time; and since the new sovereign's accession, the parliament, as we have said, have been naturally indisposed for a struggle: but we shall look with no small anxiety for the complexion of the divisions on the re-assembling of the house. But the present is the time for the people to exert themselves—to act with judgment, determination and soberness—to reject incompetent persons, or persons who make a trade of their office as parliamentary men. Now is the time for the people to remember that the choice of representatives should not be merely a thing of habit or of clamour, but a serious duty to be exercised fearlessly and conscientiously. Let them look about for men whom it will not be a disgrace to point to as the representatives of their political sentiments. Let them seek for men of sound common sense, and who have a character for *goodness*, and honesty and consistency, if any such can be found, and surely there are a few yet remaining, albeit they be but a few, floating at distant intervals in the mighty gulf. Let no profligate—no notoriously immoral or licentious man—no extravagant bully—no foul-mouthed demagogue—no corrupt and tainted speech-maker—no haughty idiot with empty head and emptier heart—no man that grinds the faces of the poor, and fawns with loathsome and revolting adulation upon those above him—let none such as these be elected—for such as these let no man vote, unless he wish to live under the reign of folly and oppression, and die, bequeathing no honourable freedom to his children. Let every man before he gives his vote, ask himself if the person he votes for is one who has shown by his actions that he fears God, honours the king, and remembers the poor; if he be not, let the vote be recalled, though he were in the act of pronouncing it. We know but too well what late parliaments have been—we know how rare, how very rare, is honesty. How unblushingly impertinence and affectation, and mean crawling subserviency have exposed themselves, and ignorance has brayed, and smirking folly has held up his head, and religion has been sneered at, and humanity scorned as ridiculous. Away! away! let there be no more of this, if it be possible—and if it be not possible—if “The homely beauty of the good old cause” is to be no more remembered except in poetry, still let each individual recollect that his duty as a man demands that he should not go with the stream, because he cannot effectually resist the stream. A man may not individually be able to effect much for society, but in political matters, as in every thing else, his own conscience should bind him to do what is honest and honourable, for the sake of the *principle*, whatever may be the practical result. We fear this is but a stupid article, for we feel moody enough, alas! when we apply ourselves to the consideration of public affairs; but let the indulgent reader persevere, and he will find us merry enough at the back of the book.